

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Slavery Haunting America

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In its founding moment, America failed the dream of life, liberty, and equal justice for all. What Murray Stein calls the European “naked power shadow” generating the acquisition of the Americas (262) manifested in our white forefathers’ choice to maintain slavery in order to graft the colonies into the United States. The history of black people in America both before and since emancipation bears witness to the distance between the American dream and the reality of their lives.¹ Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer-prize winning novel, *Beloved*, calls the history of slavery back as a ghost Americans have buried in darkness. Part of the darkness, it suggests, is the limits of the American dream as first articulated in the Declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That articulation fails to include the ideal that human love be extended to all human beings, love in the sense of affirming and assisting the existence of the other for his or her own sake and for the sake of a just community. I do not know a western name for this kind of love. It is not the intimate love we have for those we personally know. We cannot call it civic love because it is not limited to citizens. Probably the closest word we have is agape, but agape has come to mean superabundant, even divine love. The kind of love I am trying to talk about does not depend upon any particular understanding of divinity, but rather upon a particular understanding of humanity. The closest word I know is an African word, “ubuntu,” which, according to the African Concise Oxford Dictionary, means: ‘a spirit of fellowship, humanity, and compassion . . .’ (qtd. in Berg 244). What the imagined, articulated American dream lacked was such a spirit, and without it, Americans corrupted the pursuit of the American dream by institutionalizing slavery in the Constitution. The love I’m talking about—let me call it American-dream love—cannot coexist with slavery. Slavery is the antithesis of such love. As Jung remarked, “where force rules there is no love . . .” (CW 17, 309).

As the title indicates, Morrison’s novel essentially explores questions of love. One of the conundrums the novel presents is Morrison’s choice of a largely forgotten historical incident—the murder by Margaret Garner of her children to avoid their return to slavery—as the heart of her exploration of love.² The story of the main character, Sethe, is based on Margaret Garner’s. As an escaped slave, Sethe murders one of her children and attempts to murder the other three when they

are threatened with capture. Morrison's creation of Sethe's infanticide as the pivotal incident through which to imagine the subjective lives of slaves before, during, and after the Civil War suggests ghosts haunting not only the dominant American cultural unconscious, but also the cultural unconscious of the African-American community.

The murdered infant haunts her mother and her family as a baby until she suddenly appears as a young woman who says that her name is Beloved. She is a psychic phenomenon in fictional flesh. Jung, when commenting on Faust, points out that Goethe, to judge from the dedication, "Once more you hover near me, forms and faces," is claiming that "this is what *actually happened*," giving witness to "the objectivity of psychic experience" (CW 17, 212). The ghost, Beloved, is the psychic experience of Toni Morrison written so as possibly to become the psychic experience of her readers. Through Beloved, Morrison is raising from the cultural unconscious of America and from that of African-Americans the victimized energy born of the institution of slavery. Her novel is no mere historical recreation, but is what Clarissa Pinkola Estés calls a sacred story, that is, a facing of evil for purposes of healing (12). Not a product of memory, Beloved is a subjective creation that "emerges . . . to challenge a continuous process of forgetting, refusal and evasion" (Guth 326). Beloved is a ghost promising transformation. Jung says of spirits: "Spirits are complexes of the collective unconscious which . . . seek to replace an inadequate attitude of a whole people by a new one" (CW 8, 597). Beloved's characterization and her effects upon the other characters in the novel illuminate the unconscious legacy of slavery in ways that can engender new consciousness about love in both the dominant and the African-American cultures.

Many a critic has read *Beloved* as if it were an actual historical account of slave subjectivity.³ Certainly Morrison draws upon actual history, and not only in her adapting of the Margaret Garner story. Carl D. Malmgren points out that Morrison "makes reference to the persecution of the Cherokee Indians . . . , to the history of Cincinnati, to the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1870's, to . . . the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, manumission, Dred Scott, Sojourner Truth, the underground railway, [and] the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio" (192). Morrison even makes use of iconography such as the famous photograph of the slave known as Gordon showing his back as a welter of scars (Keiser 1651-52), an image she transfers to the back of Sethe.

But it is essential to recognize that *Beloved* is not history. *Beloved* is an *imagination* of the subjectivity of slaves passing from slavery to freedom. The fact that Morrison's transmission of unconscious material occurs a century later augurs meaning for African-Americans and all Americans now.

Jung perceived the connection of art, focusing on literary art, and the collective unconscious in his essay, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry"

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(*CW* 15, 130-31). There he claims that artists bring from the collective unconscious materials needed by people of a culture for their development. Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, raises from the darkness of American cultural unconsciousness the destructive effects of slavery on the experience of love. In fact, her novel indicts the institution of slavery itself as a failure of love so profound as to infiltrate and corrupt the most sacred experiences of human love: between mates, and between mother and child. That *Beloved* can be read as raising the phantom of infanticide haunting the cultural unconscious of African-Americans is pregnant with possible healing. As Jung pointed out, "In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness" (*CW* 9i, 487). Samuel L. Kimbles specifically affirms the healing possibility of bringing cultural unconscious materials to consciousness: "Psychological work, whether done individually or by the collective, may transform what had been experienced as pure fact into thoughts, feelings and beliefs that can be reflected upon and altered" ("Collective Shadow Processes" 232).

The role of feelings in the process of transformation is crucial. Jung recognizes their importance in his discussion of the impotence of ideas without them. He says that an idea requires an "affect that is ready to seize hold" of it. Otherwise, "An idea . . . is nothing but an intellectual counter that can have no influence on life, because in this state it is little more than an empty word" (*CW* 8, 634). The surfacing of unconscious material in imaginative literature contains more transformative potential than a conceptual analysis because imaginative literature engages emotions through narrative and sensuous language. Toni Morrison's raising of the cultural ghost of infanticide in a novel is a particularly powerful means of bringing an unconscious heritage into conscious focus for reflection and psychological movement. Her novel is a fulfillment of the need to bring into relationship "the life of the past that still exists in us with the life of the present" (Jung, *CW* 9i, 267).

The post-Jungian concepts of cultural shadow and cultural complex can provide a framework through which to explore why the focus on infanticide has been necessary.⁴

Joseph Henderson articulated a concept of a cultural level of the unconscious psyche in 1962.⁵ This articulation led to subsequent application by other theorists of psychological concepts such as shadow and complexes to cultures. Rinda West, for example, states: "Like the construction of ego, the construction of culture engenders shadow: some beliefs and behaviors must be suppressed, and these make up the unconscious, repressed, and denied shadow of the culture" (14). In addition to the concept of shadow, the concept of the complex has been theoretically explored and therapeutically applied to cultures, a record of which exists in

Thomas Singer's and Samuel L. Kimbles' book, *The Cultural Complex*. Kimbles maintains that "The subject of the cultural complex is the group with its affects, beliefs and rituals. However, cultural complexes become known through the activity and play of individual consciousness" ("A cultural complex" 201-02). Thinking of African-Americans as a group, one could then think of Sethe's murder, the "activity" of an "individual consciousness," as manifesting a group shadow leading to a complex suffered by African-American mothers. Kimbles says of group shadow, "Collective shadow processes, from Jung's point of view, would be generated just as individual shadow processes, through the return of repressed elements in the ethnic, racial, religious, and/or nation group that have not been consistent with the collective ideals of the group" ("Collective Shadow Processes" 215). Certainly a mother's killing her children is not consistent with the collective ideals of African-Americans.

In fact, black motherhood is not only culturally revered but exalted. Andrea O'Reilly, for example, in *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, creates a paean to African-American motherhood. O'Reilly's book cites a pantheon of African-American intellectuals affirming the centrality and excellence of black American mothers. In contrast to what O'Reilly claims is a common white, educated, middle-class, feminist view of motherhood as an obstacle to the realized life of the mother, O'Reilly asserts: "First, mothers and motherhood are valued by, and central to African-American culture. Secondly, it is recognized that mothers and mothering are what make possible the physical and psychological well-being and empowerment of African-American people and the larger African-American culture" (4). This sentiment, oft-repeated in O'Reilly's book by various black intellectuals, such as bell hooks and Patricia Collins (11), underlines the puzzle created by Morrison's focus on maternal infanticide and the paradox of the general embrace of the novel by notable spokespersons for African-Americans. Indeed, in the face of the book's representation of infanticide by a black mother, Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Alice Walker, among "48 prominent black writers and intellectuals," wrote in protest that Morrison did not get nominated for the National Book Award for *Beloved*, apparently concurring in her choice of Garner's infanticide as the story through which to represent black slave subjectivity (Als 75).

So revered is motherhood in African-American culture that a number of critics have found rather tortured ways to justify Sethe's murder. O'Reilly, for example, writes that "At times, as with Sethe in *Beloved*, a mother must resort to extreme measures, the murder of her child, in order to provide protection" (118). Eusebio L. Rodriguez claims Sethe's murder "transforms itself from a mere killing into a ritual sacrifice of the beloved, an expression of the helpless rage and outrage of many slave mothers who either wanted to or did kill their young to deliver them from

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slavery” (75-76). Carolyn A. Mitchell carries the religious interpretation of Sethe’s infanticide even further. She compares Sethe to Christ, “for she certainly did die figuratively in her attempt to give Beloved life. In both instances, death is the price paid for freedom” (176). The need to defend Sethe’s killing of her child is implied in Mitchell’s claim that Morrison “dares the reader to condemn Sethe for her decisions” (175).

Many readers do. As examples, Carolyn M. Jones criticizes what the character Paul D. calls Sethe’s too “thick” love (343); Howard W. Fulweiler thinks the murder an “unnatural” act (120); Peter J. Capuano labels Sethe’s murder “barbaric” (101). Clearly a central nerve is painfully awakened by Morrison’s choice of infanticide as the gateway into the subjectivity of slaves. Morrison, herself, acknowledges the conundrum. In an interview, she claims that Sethe’s murder was “absolutely the right thing to do,” yet adds, “she had no right to do it” (Rothstein C17).

Perhaps Morrison’s choice of Garner’s story might be partially explained through the concept of “phantom” unconscious cultural transmissions, a concept developed by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Kimbles explains that Abraham and Torok studied the unconscious intergenerational passing on of events “too shameful even to be spoken about by previous generations” (“Collective Shadow Processes” 222). Kimbles specifically applies this concept of the phantom transmission of “an earlier generation’s traumatic complexes” (“Collective Shadow Processes” 222) to the contemporary American black experience, citing the desire for “reparation for slavery” (“Collective Shadow Processes” 223). Viewing Morrison’s focus on slave infanticide as a surfacing of such a phantom, a Jungian reading would see such a phenomenon as a healing movement of the African-American cultural unconscious. The appearance of unconscious materials in an imaginative work is an opportunity for conscious reflection and movement toward increased psychological freedom.

I am not suggesting that Margaret Garner’s particular act of infanticide has been an unconscious phantom haunting the unconscious of descendants of black American slaves. However, maternal slave infanticide, as a symbol of the slave mother’s entrapment as regarded her children, may be.

The question of black slave mothers killing their children is a loaded one. According to Debbie Lee, author of *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, slave mothers were typically represented by sympathetic abolitionists through “distressing images of infanticide, or suicide, or—just as likely—both” (196). She reports that “Women who did, or could, kill their children, and women who were happy when their children died, were discussed in documents of all kinds, though plantation reports are the richest source of information. Plantation owners, doctors,

and overseers suspected that slave women regularly gave themselves abortions and otherwise committed infanticide” (D. Lee 196). The manager of the Newton Estate in 1797, for example, claimed “a slave woman named Mary Thomas, after delivering a child, had set out with her mother and sister to murder it” (D. Lee 197). The most significant evidence for the practice of slave suppression of regeneration is probably the correlation between improved treatment of slaves and rising birth rates. Lee explains, “Plantations like the Codrington Estate in Barbados, that instituted relatively humane policies for slaves—bigger food rations, fewer floggings—saw a marked increase in fertility and infant survival” (197). Of course, birth rate and infant survival could have been due to better nourished and less physically punished slaves, but there is an implication that the slaves themselves were exercising some control in their birthing of children. Morrison, herself, dramatizes this phenomenon in her characterization of Sethe’s mother.

Sethe had only an occasional glimpse of her mother in the field. She is told by a surviving friend of her mother’s, Nan, that her mother chose for her to live, and for her other children to die. She tells Sethe of her mother having been “taken up many times by the crew” during the journey to America. She tells her that her mother killed the offspring of these rapes: “The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away” (62). Sethe, a child of love, she kept. Nan explains, “Without names she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around” (62). Sethe takes in that “She threw them all away but you” (62). Sethe’s mother killed her children in resistance to and rejection of rape by white men. As a slave, she used one of the few powers she had, her power over the life and death of her progeny, as her tool of free choice, choosing only the child of love to live. She is mirroring the power over life being assumed by her enslavers, except that she can wreak that power only on her own children.

Besides the issue of slave mother literal infanticide is that of participation in the death of children symbolically as mothers helplessly cooperated in the sale of their children. According to Lee, Mary Prince was the first former woman slave to publish her story in Britain. Prince says her mother described dressing her for sale as “shrouding” (210). Since many a slave mother had to participate in the yielding of her child for sale, a kind of symbolic infanticide might well have been a common psychological suffering.

This kind of participation in the symbolic death of children is carried in Morrison’s novel by Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law and *Beloved*’s grandmother. Baby Suggs has born eight children by six fathers (23). She has yielded seven of her eight children, all but Halle, Sethe’s husband, to sale. Knowing she was to lose them actually prevents Baby Suggs from loving the later ones to spare herself the agony of loss. Two daughters have been sold and died

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(144); one son whom she'd had by "coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping" him has been "traded for lumber" (23); another child, the result of a coupling in which she had been promised there would be no child, "she could not love and the rest she would not" (23). Only with Halle does she have a facsimile of a normal parent-child relationship, and Halle, too, is taken from her when he loses his mind from the experience of helplessly watching his wife's milk being stolen from her (68-69). Her inability to prevent her children's sale makes her representative of the slave experience of symbolic infanticide.

Yet Baby Suggs also represents maternal love in the sense of "othermothering," or being a community mother, a practice grounded in slave women's helping care for the children of field workers (O'Reilly 5-6). Baby Suggs receives freedom through the labor of her son, Halle (11). After she experiences her heart as her own (141), she begins to preach to the free black community living in Bluestone outside Cincinnati. The message of her sermons is to love themselves since they had not been loved. She says, "Here . . . we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs. . . . Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it" (88). Through her sermons and community mothering, Baby Suggs lives out and models for her community—at least until Sethe's murder of Beloved—what I am calling American-dream love.

The collective history of slave mothers committing suicide with their children is suggested in the memories of Beloved whose experience of being in the grave is conflated with the experience of black people being brought to America in slave ships. Through her mind runs the following description reminiscent of that horrendous journey: "in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women [*sic*] storms rock us. . ." (211). In her inner world the loss of her mother and the suicides of mothers with their children on the slave ships are merged in the following images: "she goes in the water [*sic*] with my face" (212).

The literal infanticide that readers experience in detail is Sethe's killing of Beloved. Baby Suggs who was unable, once free, to find her lost children (143, 147) feels the happiness of free motherhood when Sethe and her children successfully escape and come to her. Her hope of life, however, is crushed when "the whitefolks . . . come into [her] yard" (178), under the authority of the Fugitive Slave Law. Sethe snatches up her children and runs from the sheriff, the slave catcher, and two of the men who had violated her by stealing her milk on the plantation where she had lived, "Sweet Home." Sethe tries but fails to bash the brains of three of her children, but succeeds in taking a saw to the neck of her older daughter, Beloved (148-49).

What, then, were the possibilities of a slave mother's relation to her children?

She could be helpless in preparing them for sale, an experience Prince images as “shrouding.” She could, as the novel suggests Sethe’s mother might have (203), try to escape, leaving her child in the virtual death of being a slave. Or she could watch them become slaves on the plantation where she was a slave. Through repeated images showing slaves being fragmented or empty of a self, Morrison portrays slavery as a kind of psychological death.⁶ Sethe’s mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, for example, refers to slave life as making a home with “a self that was no self” (140). A mother choosing to birth and allow children to grow up to be slaves could hope they would someday escape, but Sethe’s experience of attempts to escape makes that path seem not only difficult beyond bearing but also hopeless. She says to Paul D. of her own escape, “it cost too much!” (15). Her own mother is hanged, the novel hints, for trying to escape (203). So is one of the men Sethe knew from Sweet Home, Paul A, who is not only hanged but beheaded (198). Another man from Sweet Home who tries to escape, Sixo, is burned and then shot to death (226). Paul D., the character who returns to Sethe at the beginning of the novel, also is caught trying to escape, has a three-pronged collar put around his neck (227), a bit put into his mouth (69) and is sold down South where he tries to kill his new owner and is sold again into a chain gang housed in boxes under the earth (106). Sethe, herself, almost dies trying to escape. She had already sent her daughter and sons ahead and is eager to get her milk to Beloved, but she’s been brutally beaten (202), her shoeless feet are swollen blobs, and she’s near-term pregnant (32). After running as far as she can, she collapses and thinks, ““I believe this baby’s ma’am is gonna die in wild onions on the bloody side of the Ohio River”” (31). After miraculously succeeding in getting to Ohio, her heroic efforts are reduced to ashes as the sheriff, slave catcher, and owners come to recapture her and her children. Morrison, in her imagined representation of slave mothers’ subjectivity, portrays the choice to yield one’s children to a life of slavery in hopes they could escape as futile.

In other words, Morrison’s selection of the Margaret Garner story highlights the fact that there existed no simply life-affirming choice a slave mother could make with regard to her children. The only choice not involving an actual or virtual death of the child and the consequent sense of failed mothering in the mother was the choice for freedom. Only in freedom did a mother have the power to do what she believed right for the life of her child. Once Sethe understands her husband will no longer be allowed to sell any of his labor to get the money to free their children as he has his mother, she realizes she has to escape with her children (196-97).

Once free, the characters begin to discover their individual selves. Baby Suggs, for example, suddenly realizes, ““These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.” Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own

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heartbeat. Had it been there all along?" (141) Sethe, upon reaching the free soil of Ohio, feels for the first time entitled to love. Talking to Paul D. about that moment and about her children, she says: "Look like I love em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon—there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to" (162).

Slave mothers, in short, could not escape the socially imposed role of breeders in order to function as loving mothers except by somehow attaining freedom, a state denied them by the United States Constitution while they lived in the South. Attain freedom, Sethe, through incredible danger and suffering, did. United States law, however, also denied escaped slaves freedom through the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Even if slaves managed to escape to the North where slavery was illegal, their owners could come and legally claim them. These fugitive slave laws were further American legalizations of treating human beings as objects of power instead of loving them. Sethe, when the sheriff, slave catcher, and her former owners come to reclaim her and her children under the law, is faced either with actually killing her children to avoid their enduring slavery, or symbolically participating in their death by allowing them to live in the psychological "no-self" of slavery. By definition, *there was no way for a slave mother not to experience her inability to provide her children a free life; rather she was helpless, or as in the case of Mary Prince's mother, felt complicit, in the face of the virtual death of her child as that child became a slave.* The only other choice was actively to abort or kill her child, a choice that at least expressed subjective intent to save the child from slavery. No wonder such a legacy would be repressed. The slave mother's lack of freedom lies behind Morrison's⁷ and Sethe's revelation that "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (132). The slave mother's dilemma of no good choices for her child is the cultural legacy of the trauma of slavery surviving as a phantom in the African-American cultural unconscious, one Morrison's novel unearths for reflection and healing.

As I have indicated, the concepts of cultural shadow and cultural complexes provide a way of trying to begin to understand the psychological import for the collective of Morrison's unearthing of *Beloved*. Cultural shadow is archetypal in its source, that is, is inherent in human psyche, such as the capacity to assume the power of life and death over another. In that sense, infanticide is a reflection of shadow. A cultural complex has the characteristics of complexes. Thomas Singer and Samuel L. Kimbles describe these as being "repetitive," "resisting consciousness," and collecting "experience that confirms their historical point of view" ("Introduction" 6). They describe cultural complexes as "historical group experiences that have taken root in the cultural unconscious of the group"

("Introduction" 7). When a cultural complex is "activated," Singer and Kimbles explain that frequently it is projected ("Introduction" 6). In Morrison's novel, Sethe becomes the carrier for the community of the guilt complex resulting from a structural inability of slave mothers to provide free lives to their children. She is scapegoated. As symbols, Sethe's story and the effects of the return of her murdered child as Beloved are a cornucopia of unfolding meaning with regard to this scapegoating and to love.

Beloved has attained her name, a non-specific word used by the preacher at her funeral, through her mother's prostituting herself with the engraver's son for a headstone for her daughter's grave (5, 184). The lack of specificity allows her to represent all the unloved people brought, bought, and born as slaves.⁸ Prostitution is the means through which Sethe, out of love, repeats the sexual violation suffered by her mother and other slave women in order to bestow the name, Beloved, upon her dead child. Beloved, then, simultaneously represents the failure of the dominant culture to extend American-dream love to the people the Americans were enslaving; the death—literal or psychological—suffered by children of slave mothers; and the depth of love slave mothers had for children they voluntarily bore. Beloved is thus twice victimized and once resurrected. Sethe's act of sexual subjection embodies the slave mother's limited options with regard to loving their children. Miraculously, it leads to the survival and reappearance of the child's spirit, as indicated by the ghost's bearing the name Sethe thus purchased for her, "Beloved."

Beloved returns to Sethe in eighteen-year-old tender flesh. Personally, she is angry, accusatory, and rapaciously hungry. In terms of her relationship to the Child Archetype, she is "all that is abandoned and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful" (Jung, *CW 9i*, 300). She is abandoned in death, divine in her survival and resurrection. Her carrying archetypal energy powers her transformative effects.

Her sister, Denver, finds relief from years of isolation in her company. In fact, Denver projects her very self onto her victimized sister. Beloved's hunger, however, is focused on her mother. Both Denver and Beloved have internalized their mother's pattern of seeking a self by merging with another. Jung comments that "children are educated by what the grown-up is and not by what he [*sic*] says" (*CW 9i*, 293). Sethe, in her ruminations about Beloved, thinks: ". . . when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours" (203). Beloved experiences her very body as the same as Sethe's: "I am not separate from her . . . her face is my own . . ." (210).

Sethe, deprived of the subjectivity of a free person, thought of her children as possessions: "her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing" (251). Malmgren points out the connection to slavery of this subjective experience of love. He says "This kind of love has been infected by the logic of slavery, a logic that converts

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the Other into an object to be owned . . .” (200).⁹ Societal and psychological causality interconnect, corrupting the experience of maternal love.

The undeveloped state of the personalities of Beloved, Sethe, and Sethe’s younger daughter, Denver, is captured in their three stream-of-consciousness inner monologues. Each of them attempts to have a self by claiming possession of one of the others. Sethe and Denver claim possession of Beloved (200-04, 209); Beloved claims possession of Sethe (213). The horror of this dynamic is emphasized by the comparison of their relationships with the horrors of the post-Civil-War violence against black people: “lynchings . . . colored schools burned to the ground . . . grown men whipped . . . children whipped . . . black women raped . . . necks broken . . . human blood cooked in a lynch fire . . .” (180). The character, Stamp Paid, who had helped Sethe cross into Ohio and who had saved Denver from her mother’s attempt to kill her, hears from outside the house the arguments erupting from the relationships within. He thinks those speaking them were “the people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood . . .” (181). Through this merged image, Morrison likens the destructive emotional relationships resulting from the slave mother’s incapacity to offer her children lives in freedom with the most violent viciousness white racists inflicted on black people. The complicated mother-daughter relationships are portrayed as a face of the legacy of murderous racism. Again, the interconnection of societal and psychological forces corrupts mother-daughter love. The characters were: ‘locked in a love that wore everybody out’ (243).

The argument Sethe and Beloved are having is over what Sethe did to her. Beloved experienced her death as a lack of love, the absence of her mother, of her smile—abandonment: “Beloved accused her of leaving her behind . . . of not smiling at her. She said they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?” (241) Beloved could not be moved from her sense of not having been adequately given to. She is in the state Jung calls “[t]he initial stage of personal infantilism . . . of an ‘abandoned’ or ‘misunderstood’ and unjustly treated child with overweening pretensions” (CW 9i, 304). Her demands were endless: “A complaint from Beloved, an apology from Sethe. . . . She took the best of everything—first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate . . . and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children . . .” (241).

Sethe longs for affirmation of her own suffering and of her love: “Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would . . . [g]ive up her own life . . . to take back just one of Beloved’s tears” (242). Sethe, in fact, gives up her job to be with Beloved, and as the food diminishes, Sethe eats almost not at all, and Beloved fattens on what there is: “the bigger Beloved got, the

smaller Sethe became” (250). The dynamic unfolds until it can go no further: “Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur” (250).

This scene portrays the stuckness and futility of a complex. There is no way a child can understand that being murdered is an act of love. As Jung says, to be human is inexorably to seek “the growth of personality, the full realization of the life-will that is born with the individual” (CW 17, 313). Sethe’s guilt complex cannot be allayed by forgiveness from the child. Further, Sethe’s murder, while clearly related to the societal strictures on the lives of slave mothers, also reflects her personal unconscious. Her character corresponds to what Jung calls “Hypertrophy of the Maternal Element.” He describes a pattern of negative mothering, parts of which apply to Sethe: “The negative aspect is seen in the woman whose only goal is childbirth. To her the husband is obviously of secondary importance. . . .” (CW 9i, 167). Sethe never is seen mourning or even missing her husband, Halle. She doesn’t hesitate to leave him in order to get her milk to her child (202). Jung continues: “Even her own personality is of secondary importance; she often remains entirely unconscious of it, for her life is lived in and through others, in more or less complete identification with all the objects in her care. First she gives birth to the children, and from then on she clings to them, for without them she has no existence whatsoever” (CW 9i, 167). While the conditions of slavery establish social causes for Sethe’s lack of developed sense of self, her maternal response can also be seen as reflective of a negative mother complex. Again, experience of social oppression factors as a cause but not as a sole explanation of a psychological response.

The complex Jung is describing also leads to a will to power: “Like Demeter, she compels the gods by her stubborn persistence to grant her the right of possession over her daughter An unconscious Eros always expresses itself as will to power” (CW 9i, 167). The will to power is certainly exhibited in Sethe’s immediate resort to murder of her children when faced with returning to the conditions of slavery. It is a will totally understandable as a counter-force to the will-to-power of the slaver-owners. As noted above, Sethe’s murder also mirrors the slave-owners in the claim to possess another. As Howard W. Fulweiler puts it, Sethe’s “murder of her child implies a belief that the child ‘belongs’ to her in a way analogous to the way in which the slaves belonged to their master” (134). Sethe is a victim whose life has been owned by slaveholders. Beloved is a victim whose life has been owned by her escaped-slave mother. The social condition of slavery makes the murder intelligible, but does not prevent the psychologically destructive aftermath.

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Jung describes these consequences: “Driven to ruthless will to power and a fanatical insistence on their own maternal rights, [such mothers] often succeed in annihilating not only their own personality but also the personal lives of their children” (CW 9i, 167). Sethe’s sons, tired of being haunted by the baby ghost, that is, by the specter of Sethe’s assertion of power over the lives of her children, run away (3). Her remaining daughter, Denver, lives in isolation and continual fear her mother will kill again, will kill her (206). When Paul D. asks Sethe if her decision to kill her children worked, her answer is that they are not back in slavery (165). She cannot claim meaningful personal lives for them. This complex seems to reflect Sethe’s personal unconscious and not that of the cultural collective she represents, because other slaves and ex-slaves did not identify themselves with their children as she does. Sethe’s own mother apparently did not when she tried to escape without taking her daughter with her.

Jung warns that a complex cannot be escaped until it has been drunk “down to the very dregs” (CW 9i, 184). He says, “As we know, a complex can be really overcome only if it is lived out to the full” (CW 9i, 184). Sethe and Beloved live out the negative mother-daughter complex so completely that they make possible an *enantiodromia*, a turning around, a development in the character of Denver that I will address shortly.

The cultural level of Sethe’s complex has to do with guilt over her inability to provide her children a life in freedom, a life free of the racist assumptions and power-impositions of the society. This complex is cultural in that this inability was not limited to Sethe. It is cultural in that it may be a phantom unconscious legacy suffered by descendants of slavery. O’Reilly cites a study of black mothers as represented in African-American literature by Joyce Elaine King and Carolyn Ann Mitchell. She says that King and Mitchell found that black mothers are portrayed as seeking but failing to protect their children. They found “two diametrically opposed modes of mothering: ‘mothers who whip their sons brutally “for their own good” and mothers who love their sons to destruction through self-sacrifice and overindulgence.’”¹⁰ Both approaches result in psychological maiming (16). Assuming that imaginative literature is an expression of unconscious materials, I interpret the King and Mitchell study as offering evidence of a continuing complex concerning how to mother black children in a racist society. Mothers can use force for the child’s good, as in Sethe’s murder of Beloved, or can overindulge the child in an attempt to compensate for what cannot be given—as Sethe does with the returned Beloved.¹¹ Morrison’s *Beloved* brings these patterns to the surface, and then explores how the ghost might be healing.

The ghost is surprisingly healing for Paul D. Not coincidentally, she appears in the flesh just as the possibility of love has appeared for her mother in the arrival of

Paul D., one of the slaves who longed for Sethe when they both were enslaved at Sweet Home. He arrives at Sethe's door after an odyssey of surviving as a captured run-away slave and then as a fugitive ex-slave after the Civil War. Sethe, who has been isolated, living a non-life since the murder of her child, is suddenly presented with the possibility of their having a "life" (46-7) together, a love.

But Beloved is jealous of them. She has a vision of sexuality watching turtles mate in the water from which she emerged (105). Seeing Sethe and Paul D. together, she cries "the way she wanted to when the turtles came out of the water . . . [t]he way she wanted to when Sethe went to him standing in the tub under the stairs" (134). In her only gesture toward development from the psychological state of a ten-month-old, Beloved seeks sex with Paul D. To his dismay, Beloved, uncanny spirit that she is, takes control of Paul D. who is trying to engage in a loving relationship with Sethe. She literally moves him out of her mother's bedroom (114) and eventually seduces him (117). Paul D. resists, but finds that the actual sex with Beloved transforms him.

Paul D. has substituted a tin box for his heart (72) to bear his personal sufferings of slavery: his brother hanged (198); his friend burned alive (227); Sethe's husband having lost his mind after helplessly watching his wife's milk being suckled by the Sweet Home foreman's nephews (69). As mentioned earlier, Paul D. had also suffered his own degradation in his being collared (227), harnessed with a bit (69), chained to a line of 46 other slaves, stored at night with them in a train of boxes buried in the earth, and forced to kneel and give oral sex to the guards (107-08). After he escaped with his fellow prisoners en masse (110-111), he wandered for eighteen years in a difficult journey to Ohio and Sethe. When Paul D. has sex with Beloved, the tin box in which he has encased his heart falls away. The seduction begins with his hearing nothing but ends with his hearing his own voice crying "Red heart. Red heart" (117).

What does it mean that sex with the returned ghost of the daughter murdered to avoid her return to slavery restores Paul D.'s ability to feel and to feel himself as masculine? Any answer must be complex. Paul D. does not know at the time of the intercourse that Sethe had murdered her daughter or that Beloved is that daughter returned. He thinks of her as a strange sugar-loving woman Sethe has taken in who owes, as he does, loyalty to Sethe. Yet he cannot resist her desire for him to "touch her inside" (116). Paul D. and Beloved are not drawn by personal affection for one another. When she appears for him to "touch," he wants to "knock her down" (116), and he remains convinced that he didn't want to have sex with her (126). When he berates her for betraying Sethe, she replies "She don't love me like I love her. I don't love nobody but her" (116). Beloved seems simultaneously to desire sexual fulfillment and to want to intensify her identity with Sethe by having the kind of relationship with Paul D. that her mother has. Even though Beloved is not

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moved by emotional relatedness to Paul D., when she asks him for sex she also asks him to “call me my name” (117). Symbolically, the murdered child of the slave-mother longs not only to be the beloved of the mother, but to have the male lover of her mother call her by the name purchased for her after her death through her mother’s selling her body. Paul D. must offer sexual energy as has Sethe to this victimized ghost, the dearly departed beloved. The ghost claims the regenerative power of the living, separates the living lovers. She will have to be exorcised for their personal love to have any chance to flourish.

Yet through his sexual relation with Beloved, Paul D. regains his heart. Another way of saying this would be that African-American male hearts have been defended against the suffering undergone by African-American women during slavery. The character in the novel who takes a moment of that suffering in, Sethe’s husband, Halle, goes insane, an example of how the horror for male slaves of helplessly taking in the suffering of the women they loved was overwhelming. By joining his masculine potency with the unladen ghost of black slave women’s suffering, Paul D. becomes a man capable of full human feeling. Morrison’s tale seems to be suggesting the centrality of the African-American male in any integration of the legacy of slavery.¹² Still, his secret union with Beloved is a sexual disloyalty to Sethe. His knowledge of his weakness and betrayal becomes part of his personal shadow integration that enables him eventually to love Sethe even while understanding that she murdered her child.

Beloved also is a catalyst for Denver’s transformation. Denver suffers from having lost even her early wounded sense of self in her need for the companionship of Beloved. When Paul D. first arrived, he fought and expelled the baby ghost haunting Sethe’s home (18-19). Since that ghost was the only company Denver had, she cried “for herself” (123). After the ghost returned as Beloved, Denver obsessively longs for her attention and companionship. When Beloved threatens to leave her, Denver cries “because she has no self” (123).¹³ The return of the murdered daughter to life calls forth from Denver a projection of self. As long as Beloved is with her, Denver can vicariously experience a miraculous survival of her mother’s murderous response to being a slave mother. At first, Denver worries that Sethe will suddenly harm Beloved again, but then she sees Beloved attempt to choke Sethe (96, 101) and realizes she is so needy of Beloved that she can do nothing: “Denver was alarmed by the harm she thought Beloved planned for Sethe, but felt helpless to thwart it, so unrestricted was her need to love another” (104). Her dependence on Beloved for her identity shames her: “The display she witnessed . . . shamed her because the choice between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict” (104). The transforming psychological element is Denver’s observing Sethe and Beloved drink their complex “to the dregs.” She begins to

understand the psychological dynamic between Sethe and Beloved being played out over and over again: “[Denver] had begun to notice that even when Beloved was quiet . . . Sethe got her going again. Whispering, muttering some justification . . . to Beloved to explain what it had been like It was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out” (252). Denver perceives Sethe’s finding some self-punitive gratification in Beloved’s repeated refusals to forgive her and Beloved’s gratification in refusing. The turning point for Denver occurs when she sees Sethe, who is starving so Beloved can eat, “spit up something she had not eaten” (243), a perception that “rocked Denver like gunshot” (243). In that instant she realizes she must rescue Sethe from Beloved. She also grasps that she must separate herself from them to do that; she must “step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help” (243). Realizing that Sethe and Beloved were incapable of breaking their mutual obsession with one another spurs Denver’s transformation from child to responsible young adult. She realizes that unless she gets a job, “[t]here would be no one to save . . . and no Denver either” (252). This thought marks a new stage in her development of self. Morrison writes: “It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve” (252). Beloved’s return functions as the catalyst of Denver’s separating from her guilt-entrapped mother and developing her own personality. She turns first to a teacher she had briefly known in childhood, Lady Jones, who receives her with sympathy and calls her “baby,” (248), thus linking this moment with the spirit of Baby Suggs. Lady Jones practices American-dream love by helping Denver, and Denver is given the name of the woman who introduced it to the community. So baptized, it becomes Denver’s task to carry American-dream love forward.

This task she performs by being willing to receive it. Members of the community begin giving gifts of food to Denver and her family, and as Denver thanks them, she and Sethe begin to become reconnected to the community. Denver’s foray into the world not only alerts the community to the ghost’s having returned in the flesh; it results in inspiring a change of heart in the community which has relentlessly ostracized Sethe since her murder. The character, Ella, represents the condemning community of Bluestone, the area outside Cincinnati where the free black people lived. She has been unyielding in her condemnation of Sethe. As she tells Stamp Paid: “‘I ain’t got no friends take a handsaw to their own children’” (187). Before the murder, Sethe had had the experience of belonging to the free black community for twenty-eight days: “days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day” (95). When the members of the community watch Sethe being carted away after the murder, they judge her as “holding her head too high”

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(153). It is Sethe's apparent feeling of somehow being in the right that is unacceptable to the community. In fact, they self-righteously reject her and leave her in isolation the entire eighteen years before *Beloved* returns (173). They need for Sethe to be properly repentant so that they, themselves, need not realize they have contributed to the murder of *Beloved*.

The morning the sheriff, slave catcher, and owners approach, the members of the community are just recuperating from a tremendous party Baby Suggs had given the night before in celebration of the arrival of Sethe and her children. They are in the throes of envy and disapproval (136-38, 157, 258). At the party, "Ninety people . . . ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry" (136). They resent Baby's Suggs's blessed, free life: "Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? . . . How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone" (137). Baby Suggs had taken her freedom and extended American-dream love to everyone, and the community felt the difference between her and themselves and were "furious" (137). They emitted a psychic energy of disapproval in the form of a "scent" (137). These feelings kept them from warning Sethe about the advent of the sheriff, the slave catcher, and the owners. Stamp Paid reflects on "why nobody ran on ahead; why nobody sent a fleet-footed son to cut 'cross a field soon as they saw the four horses in town . . . while the riders asked questions" (157). He specifically remembers that Ella failed to help: "Not Ella . . . not anybody ran down . . . to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in" (157). Stamp Paid describes the "Look": "The righteous look every Negro learned to recognize along with his ma'am's tit. Like a flag hoisted, this righteousness . . . announced the faggot, the whip, the fist, the lie, long before it went public" (157). Stamp Paid recognizes the malice in the community's inaction: "Nobody warned them, and he'd always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from a long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing—like, well, like meanness—that let them stand aside . . ." (157). Through omission of caring for another, the community cooperates in having Sethe and her children returned to slavery. They are portrayed not only as victims of the failure of love, but as judgmental people who out of angry, envious motives, can themselves fail to love. Their failure is the cumulative blow that leads Baby Suggs to stop preaching love. She had belonged "to a community of other free Negroes," had loved and been loved by them, and then had "that community step back and hold itself at a distance" (177). That betrayal together with the loss of Halle, Sethe's murder, and white people entering her yard destroyed her faith in and ability to preach love of one another. The black community thus is portrayed as sharing responsibility for the disappearance of the

candle of American-dream love that Baby Suggs had used her freedom to light. That loss is made vivid in the description of the community's and Sethe's behavior at Baby Suggs's funeral. Sethe will not sing with them, and they will not partake of Sethe's food. As Stamp Paid remembers it, "So Baby Suggs, holy, having devoted her freed life to harmony, was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite" (171).

Through this characterization of the community, Morrison insists on the full shadowed humanity of people whose color happens to be black and ancestry happens to be African. The community projects onto Sethe the cultural shadow of the slave-mother's dilemma, scapegoats her with their communal guilt, and leaves her to live alone with the ghost representing dead slave children.

Ella's story makes clear the projection. Ella is perhaps the character most injured by the effects of slavery on the slave's capacity to love. After having been locked in a room for over a year for the sexual use of her masters—"You couldn't think up . . . what them two done to me" (119)—she advises against love altogether (92). When, after Denver goes to the community for help, she hears word of the return of Beloved and of her inflicting punishment on Sethe (255), Ella feels the need for self-protection. It turns out she has allowed a child of her own, one forced upon her by her raping masters—"a hairy white thing" (258)—to die. She refused to feed the child until it starved to death (258-59). Ella consciously feels no guilt over this murder of her child, as there was no indication that Sethe's mother felt any over her murders of her children. Ella's and Sethe's mother's murders are of the children born of rape. Sylvia Perera in her explication of the ways cultures manifest what behaviors are to be scapegoated says that when a group is faced by "behaviors . . . seen as moving against the current of collective evolution at the moment . . . the community can neither totally purge and repress them, nor can it do without them. It tries to regulate them into modes acceptable to the group . . ." (14). Murdering the offspring of rape by masters seems to have been a mode acceptable to the group. Murdering offspring to protect them from masters was not. The common thread of being willing to murder offspring uniting the murderers was denied, and Sethe was scapegoated for the misery of slave-mother murder.

While Ella never reflects upon the similarity between herself and Sethe, she does not want murdered children returning to punish their parents. She organizes the women in the community to go face the ghost. Thirty of them show up, meeting her outside Sethe's house. As they gather, they remember sharing laughter and life with one another in Baby Suggs's yard (258). Through their memories, Baby Suggs's love energizes the moment. So does Ella's self-protectiveness. As the women sing and pray, the narrator says of Ella that "the idea of that pup coming back to whip her set her jaw working . . ." (259). The very thought leads her to

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scream a scream that the women with her join to exorcise Beloved from Sethe's home. Ella's very culpability generates the consciousness and will to try to exorcise the ghost. As with Paul D., consciousness of personal shadow materials makes possible healing relatedness. Paradoxically, knowledge of the failure of love results in a return of American-dream love as the community seeks to help Sethe. The raising of the repressed, of Beloved, thus brings a beginning level of healing to the community as well as to Paul D. and Denver.

For Sethe, her reconnection with Beloved results in her directing her murderous will to power outward. The day the women in the community come to her home to send away the ghost, Denver is waiting for a white man who has hired her to pick her up to go to work. This man, Mr. Bodwin, is an abolitionist who has allowed Baby Suggs, Sethe, and their family to live in his house in Bluestone (145). He helped save Sethe from prison after the murder (183, 265). Although infected with the racist delusion of white entitlements as reflected in a caricaturing statue on his lawn of a black boy saying, "At Yo Service" (255), he comes close to American-dream love in his belief that "human life is holy, all of it" (260). When Sethe, who with Beloved has gone to the porch to wonder at the collection of singing, praying women, sees the white man, Mr. Bodwin, about to come into her yard, she takes the ice pick she has been using and flies off the porch to murder him. The fact that Mr. Bodwin has been a benefactor makes her attack expressive of a color complex, a dehumanizing of people according to color. Again, her behavior mirrors the practice of the dominant society. Having been so treated herself by slave-owners is a societal but insufficient cause of her complex. That Morrison does not share this complex is evidenced not only by the character of Mr. Bodwin, but also that of the young white girl who helps Sethe when she was running away. This girl, Amy Denver, herself once an indentured servant, responds to Sethe's critical predicament with care. Amy massages Sethe's swollen feet (78), puts spider webs on Sethe's infected back (79-80), and helps deliver her baby whom Sethe names after her (84-5). Morrison's characterization of Mr. Bodwin and Amy prevents American-dream love from being attached to skin color.

That Sethe's color complex is personal is made clear in the fact that her daughter, Denver, and the exorcising women do not share it. They physically prevent Sethe from succeeding in killing Mr. Bodwin. Denver, representative of the surviving children of a culture with infanticide marking its psyche, has developed a self capable of confronting Sethe's murderous mother-love consciously and stopping it. The novel thus suggests that the hope of integrating the cultural shadow through consciousness, and of halting the intergenerational transmission of unintegrated experiences (the phantom phenomenon), lies in the developing consciousness and maturing personalities of descendants.

Still, just as with the life-generating consequences of the shadowed behavior of Paul D. and Ella, Sethe's color complex has a positive aspect. Sethe's attempt to murder Mr. Bodwin because he's white expresses a development of her personality in that she now is able to direct her aggression toward a representative of a group that has oppressed her. Drinking the guilt complex with Beloved to its dregs has freed her from turning her murderousness onto her children.

At the moment of Sethe's attack and of Denver's and the community's successful intervention, Beloved disappears (267). Just as her appearance helps Sethe develop—Sethe says when she realizes Beloved has returned to her that “she can look at things again” (201)—so does her disappearance. Sethe's murder of her daughter expressed not only the will to power of a negative mother complex, but personal and group shadow—the assumption of power over life and death. Life miraculously gives Sethe an opportunity to come to consciousness about the shadow aspect of her decision in the return of her murdered daughter, but she continues to deny any motive but love, and her beloved victim refuses to acquiesce in this self-delusion. The two are locked in hopeless conflict, Sethe resisting guilt, Beloved insisting upon it. As Marie Louise von Franz says, such a conflict must be suffered until a “creative solution is found” (60). As she puts it, “something unexpected happens which puts the whole thing onto another level. Then . . . the conflict is not solved but different” (60). Ella's desire to protect herself from the return of her murdered child, the community's willingness to let go of its ostracism to help Sethe, their singing as they had when Baby Suggs preached, Sethe's attacking a perceived enemy, Denver's joining the community in stopping her, and Mr. Bodwin's not seeking vengeance all conjoin in an unexpected event that shifts the conflict between Sethe and Beloved by resulting in Beloved's disappearance. The creative possibilities of her presence in that community had been lived out. What remained were the creative possibilities of her disappearance.

The loss of Beloved devastates Sethe but makes it possible for her to move on. Having lost the object of her projected identity, she at first wants to move on to death. She retreats to the room where Baby Suggs died in preparation to die (271). What is required of her is letting go of her identification of herself with her children. On this crucial point, critics have sorely missed the psychological concepts of cultural shadow and complex. O'Reilly, for example, writes that because slave women were viewed as breeders rather than mothers, Morrison's “grounding Sethe's subjectivity in her mother role” (128) was a deconstruction of the slave masters' ideology categorizing slave women as non-mothers. While her analysis of slave owners' ideology and her naming of the use of slave women as breeders is inarguable, her conclusion that Sethe's getting her identity from being a mother was desirable misses the unconscious cultural forces at work preventing Sethe from grounding her subjectivity in her own personality. The death of her

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projected self brought on by her failure to convince Beloved that she acted solely out of love and by Beloved's leaving her makes possible the birth of subjectivity grounded in her own being.

For this transformation to occur, she needs to be loved. Paul D., once he learned of her murder, leaves her. During the time of his abandonment of her, he speaks with Stamp Paid about Sethe and about the sufferings of slaves and of black people under white racism (233-35, 265). He is psychologically taking in suffering through reflection, turning it into transformational energy. He asks Stamp Paid, "Tell me something, Stamp . . . How much is a nigger supposed to take? Tell me. How much?" And Stamp answers him, "All he can . . . all he can" (235). In their conversations, Paul D. and Stamp reach an understanding of Sethe's instantaneous urges to kill as "crazy" (265). But they don't separate themselves from her craziness. Rather, when Stamp opines, "Yeah, well, ain't we all?" (265) they laugh with recognition, a laughter that takes them over. That level of understanding, consciousness, and connection helps Paul D. love Sethe as she is. So do his reflections on his own culpabilities. He wonders at his leaving of Sethe in the context of a lifetime of trying to run away and failing (267-68). He chooses not to run this time and returns to her house. When he opens the door to the cold house where he and Beloved had had sex, he remembers being "overwhelmed" with a "life hunger," of being repelled and shamed, and of simultaneously being grateful for "having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (264). Paul D.'s consciousness of his personal shadow and of its surprising generation of life-force further enables him to love Sethe. He searches for her in the house, and when he finds her surrendering to death, he becomes angry. His anger transports him past any remaining hesitations into direct struggle for her life. He offers to bathe her and rub her feet (272). When she begins to cry about Beloved's having left her, and repeats that Beloved was her "best thing," he stops and suddenly remembers his friend Sixo's description of the woman he loved as a "friend of your mind" (272-73). He remembers how Sethe did not shame him when he was "collared like a beast" (273), and that memory of how she is a friend of his mind leads him to invite her to share his tomorrows, to be his beloved. Then he gives her the insight she needs to get past her entrapment in the dilemma of the slave mother and her identification with her children. He says to her, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273). This vision brings her upright with the question, "Me? Me?" (273) The possibility of Sethe's developing a subjectivity based on her own being is midwived by the love of a black man able to deal lovingly with her shadow, her complexes, her suffering.

The ghost, however, is not laid; her footprints appear again and again (275). How does Beloved haunt today? Beloved is the child of slavery. She is what the

institution as practiced by white Americans engendered. Slavery itself was a monumental abandonment of human love precisely through a “master” presuming to enslave another human being. As Sethe says, under slavery, “anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. . . . Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn’t think it up” (251). *Beloved* implies that Americans who have benefitted from slavery and the subsequent privileges accorded people who are white are unconsciously haunted by the insatiable longing for love represented by the ghost of the murdered child. Racists continue to refuse human love to black people. Other white Americans consider themselves non-racist because they remain largely unconscious of race, but this unconsciousness does not answer the cries of the murdered child for an affirmation of his or her right to life and love nor of the enslaved mother prevented from offering life in freedom to her children. Those cries need to be acknowledged and responded to.

Morrison’s novel focuses, however, on slavery as a ghost haunting the psyche of black descendants of slavery in order to facilitate their healing. Her novel implies that slavery has left conflicts about loving which live as unconscious ghosts in the psyche of black descendants, ghosts they can recognize and exorcise. In that sense, they are freed of dependence on white society for transforming conflicts inherited from their history.

The fact that these psychological possibilities are raised through a fiction is not irrelevant. Thomas Singer has written that the “fate of the world” hangs not on the individual psyche, but on each “injured culture” learning how to “drink to the dregs its own complexes, as well as those of its neighbors, allies and enemies” (31). Still, it is a work against the “defenses of the group spirit,” as Singer has called them (13ff), for a group that has been denied love, that has been oppressed, to recognize its own shadow and complexes. The guilt of the white slave-owners and racists is so obvious and clear, and the sense of victimization so justified, it is difficult not to be blinded to one’s human participation in unconsciousness and its enslaving cruelties. Yet groups, just as individuals, are demanded by life and the striving for its fulfillment to come to consciousness. Singer says, “To settle down the archetypal defenses of the group spirit, the collective psyche itself and its often traumatized . . . spirit need to individuate, and this is not the work of an individual or of analysis alone” (31). A fiction such as Morrison’s *Beloved* offers a group experience that can catalyze that individuation process. It manifests the wisdom Clarissa Pinkola Estés claims she has learned from her ancestors: “When you have a great difficulty on the face of this earth, when things go very wrong, then you no longer belong to yourself anymore. You now belong to your whole community. When you face Evil, you are facing it not only for yourself, but for all who live, all who once lived and for all who will one day be born” (67). Morrison has done that

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immense work through the characters, plot, and symbols in *Beloved*. We, her readers, members of cultures inheriting the unconscious legacy of slavery, can join her in this work by attempting, as Eli and Esti Weisstub in their study of collective trauma and cultural complexes, prescribe, to “accept shadow aspects of [our] identity . . . [to become more] ‘collectively individuated . . .’” (167).

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* depicts slavery as a force that twisted mother-love from a life-engendering force into a death-dealing tragedy that unconsciously haunts black descendants in their coping with white racism today, and unconsciously haunts white Americans with the ghost of the murdered black child, now an insatiable, accusing victim-ghost. Morrison’s imaginings call forth from the cultural unconscious of black and white Americans alike the haunting challenges to love issuing from the history of slavery. They clarify the need for the American dream to include people caring for one another if life, liberty, and equal justice for all are to be conscientiously pursued. Morrison has imagined for us a narrative examining the longing for—and effects of the deprivation of—love caused by slavery, and the transforming effects of consciously performed acts of love in freedom.

May her vision help us all see our cultural ghosts, and through our own shadow integration and becoming conscious of our complexes, participate not only in exorcising our ghosts, but in internalizing and practicing American-dream love.

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Notes

- ¹ Since this paper was written, a majority of Americans have elected Barack Obama as President of the United States, marking a major shift in American psychology with regard to black Americans. Significant as President Obama's election is, racism against black people continues to haunt America.
- ² Graciela Moreira-Slepoy explains that Morrison learned of Garner's murder through accidentally seeing an old newspaper story. She says Morrison "came across a newspaper clipping entitled, 'A Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child,' published in the *American Baptist* in 1856" (para. 3).
- ³ Monika M. Elbert claims that "Although published in 1987, Toni Morrison's . . . *Beloved* may just as well have been written in the nineteenth century" (38). Graciela Moreira-Slepoy says that *Beloved* "is the actualization of a past that refuses to be encapsulated by linear notions of time" (para. 13). Even as famous a reader as Margaret Atwood claims that reading *Beloved*, "We experience American slavery as it was lived by those who were its objects of exchange" (49).
- ⁴ Rachel Lee focuses on the lack of language the characters have to "express, encompass, and comprehend (but not necessarily mitigate) Sethe's act" (291). Examining *Beloved* in terms of the concepts of cultural unconsciousness, cultural shadow, and cultural complex offers a language for understanding Sethe's murder psychologically. Caroline Rody has recognized that Morrison's representation of history needs to be read psychologically. She argues for the novel's making possible greater psychological awareness in readers (91). When addressing the question of what that awareness consists of, however, Rody does not have the concepts of cultural shadow or cultural complex to help her. Her reading of *Beloved* is that it "reconceives the historical text as a transformative space . . . in which the present takes the past in a new and transforming embrace, constructed for mutual healing" (95), a generalization unable to identify the cultural unconscious contents being brought to awareness for reflection and possible integration.
- ⁵ While most scholars cite Joseph Henderson's 1984 book, *Cultural Attitudes in Psychological Perspective*, as the source of the idea of a cultural unconscious, Thomas B. Kirsch points out (185) that Henderson first articulated the idea in a lecture, "The Archetype of Culture," given at the Second International Congress for Analytical Psychology in 1962. In this lecture, Henderson indeed postulates a "cultural layer of the unconscious" (7). In his 1984 work, Henderson describes what he believes to be four basic cultural attitudes—the social, the religious, the aesthetic, and the philosophic—that he ascribes to "an archetypal matrix" (58). Both of his formulations emphasize the archetypal aspect of culture in that they focus not on cultures and their expressions of

unconsciousness, but rather on persons who across cultures manifest particular attitudes toward grasping culture. His idea has since accrued its more current meaning: aspects of unconsciousness shared by members of a culture.

⁶ See the article “‘will the parts hold?’:The Journey Toward a Coherent Self in *Beloved*” by Betty Jane Powell for a detailed analysis of Morrison’s portrayal of the psychological fragmentation resulting from slavery.

⁷ Morrison in an interview with Mervyn Rothstein, says, “But mother love is also a killer” (C17).

⁸ Caroline Rody asserts that through naming her ghost Beloved, Morrison gives “narrative love” (94). Rody explains, “Th[e] implied function of narrative love seeks to repair the violation of love wreaked upon Morrison’s characters by slavery, separation, and death” (94).

⁹ Jeanna Fuston-White argues that Sethe’s problem is that she did not own her own children (3). Of course, she is right in the sense that the children’s being “owned” was what made the situation of a slave mother so impossible. Morrison does not present the solution, however, as a transfer of ownership, which would continue the mentality of slave owners, but as legal freedom.

¹⁰ O’Reilly refers readers to Joyce Elaine King and Carolyn Ann Mitchell, *Black Mothers to Sons: Juxtaposing African American Literature with Social Practice*, New York: Peter Lang, 1995, 9-10.

¹¹ Reading the results of this research, I was reminded of a black principal I knew who dedicated her life successfully to enabling black adolescents who had had trouble finishing high school to get a high school diploma and in many instances go on to college. One detail of her life reminds me of Sethe’s dilemma. This principal was adamant with her students, particularly her male students that they never, ever speak up in their own defense if the police were to stop them. She actually made this instruction part of the curriculum on the grounds that racist police have the power of life and death over those they stop. She was faced with a dilemma similar to Sethe’s, and she made the opposite choice. Of course the consequences of cooperation with white supremacy represented by the police are immeasurably different from those facing Sethe for cooperating with the slave catcher. But the consequences of resistance are comparable—physical beatings, death or imprisonment. Given the history of slavery, I wonder if the students’ submission, advised by their mentor, is a form of being haunted by the ghost of the child murdered out of love. Is their surviving afterwards unconsciously haunted by this ghost? Every time a black mother or mother substitute warns her child to submit to white domination, is she faced with Sethe’s dilemma, and must she experience again and again the pain of returning her child to that domination? Does the ghost of the alternative, allowing her child to so perceive himself as an equal as perhaps to be killed, as, for example, Emmet Till was killed,

haunt her? The dilemma of maternal love in a racist society seems to me an echo of that of enslaved mothers.

¹² Nancy Kang argues that *Beloved* emasculates Paul D. (845), but his transformation into a man able to feel again negates this argument.

¹³ The Object Relations critic, Barbara Schapiro, explains the lack of an autonomous subjectivity in the child of a slave as the inability of a slave child to see her mother “as an independent subject . . .” (157) because slavery prevented her mother from being one (158). *Denver and Beloved*, I would argue, both attribute to Sethe an independent subjectivity so powerful that they feel their own lives subject to it. An independent subjectivity is not the same as a personality rooted in the self.